

Bear Block--Penko Building
404 South Palafox Street
Pensacola
Escambia County
Florida

HABS No. FLA-201

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

BEAR BLOCK--PENKO BUILDING

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Location: 404 South Palafox Street, Pensacola, Escambia County, Florida. This building is located on the northeast corner of Palafox and Main Streets.

Present Owner and Occupant: Pensacola Restaurant Supply Company

Present Use: Sales area, offices and warehouse

Statement of Significance: This structure is an excellent example of Pensacola's late nineteenth century commercial architecture, which retains its original sheet metal finish materials, timber and cast iron structural elements, and decorative cast iron trim.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The site of the existing structure was occupied by a two story frame building which had a fish market on the first floor and the city jail on the second floor. Lewis Bear purchased the lot and demolished that building to clear the site for the existing structure, built in 1892. The Lewis Bear Company vacated the building in 1958 and sold it to the Pensacola Restaurant Supply Company.
2. Date of erection: 1892
3. Architect: Unknown
4. Original plans and construction information: None known
5. Alterations and additions: Building extended to the east at an unknown date.
6. Important old views: The Pensacola Bliss' Quarterly, January, 1897, contains a photograph which illustrated a Lewis Bear & Co. advertisement.

- B. Historic Events and Persons Connected with the Structure: Lewis Bear immigrated from Bavaria, Germany, and settled in Greenville, Alabama, where he, along with a Mr. Black, operated a retail grocery store. Moving to Pensacola in 1876, Bear opened a retail grocery store on the southwest corner of

Intendencia and Barcelona Streets, next door to his residence. After several years the business moved to the west side of Palafox across from Plaza Ferdinand (HABS No. FLA-207) and developed into a wholesale-retail operation. At the same time Bear constructed a two-story frame house on Romana east of Tarragona.

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The business, then called Lewis Bear & Co., became very much involved in supplying groceries to lumber ships docked at the busy Pensacola port. Goods were delivered in horse or mule drawn drays. During this period the company was also supplying groceries to Pensacola and other areas including Ft. Walton, Panama City and the Appalachicola Bay vicinity. The company continued in the retail business, though in a progressively smaller and smaller degree.

As the Lewis Bear Co. continued to grow, more space became a necessity; so in 1892 the company built the Bear Block to house the company's offices and its warehouse. To accommodate the increased wholesale business the company purchased another building on the northeast corner of Tarragona and Government Streets for additional space. In 1899 the company discontinued its retail business.

By 1900 the three sons of Lewis Bear, who had died in 1895, were operating the family business which had expanded into a building on Bruce Street between Garden and Romana Streets. That structure was used as a stable for the horses and mules. In 1901 the company was incorporated and the business began selling drugs, sundry items, and beauty aids. Within a few years building supplies and hardware were added to the merchandise lines. In 1905 the company expanded into a new two-story building in the southeast corner of Main and Jefferson Streets and began to wholesale alcoholic beverages.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: Lewis Bear Company, Inc., history (unpublished manuscript).
2. Secondary and published sources: Pensacola Daily News, 1899.

Prepared by Rodd L. Wheaton
Architect, HABS
1972

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

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A. General Description: This rectangular plan building has two floors of sales, office and storage areas. The exterior of the building is characterized by the use of cast iron and pressed sheet metal details. Although the interior has been remodeled, much structural, circulatory and finish material remains.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The structure measures 75'-4" x 125'-6", including its east addition. The west (front) canopy over the sidewalk extends an additional 10'-0" from the building.
2. Foundations: Where exposed, the foundations are brick.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: At the front facade below the sidewalk canopy the brick walling is stuccoed and is scored to imitate ashlar. The second floor level of the front facade is covered with pressed sheet metal detailing. Common bond brickwork characterizes the exposed north and south elevations which have corbelled courses delineating the second floor level. A brick pilaster at the south elevation marks the common wall between the original building and the east addition. There are one-story pilasters at the west corners and flanking the central three bays of the front, west facade. The stucco is painted dark green. The iron and sheet metal surfaces, with a sand texture, are painted cream, white, and green.
4. Structural system: In addition to the brick bearing walls, there are timber and cast iron columns in nine bays approximately eight feet on center. The 9½" square wood columns have chamfered edges and wood bracket capitals 3'-8" long and 9½" square in section. The 10" diameter Tuscan cast iron columns have echinus flanges which support a rectangular, flat abacus plate. The structural uprights receive laminated beams made from 2" x 12" members bolted together. The structural system is variously boxed and exposed in conjunction with miscellaneous wood and steel framing.
5. Porches: The sidewalk canopy extends from the west facade of the building to the edge of the grassed parking strip parallel to the street. The canopy is supported on 4½" cast iron columns, in six bays, twelve feet on center. Each column, on a simple base, has an applied scotia-torus-scotia moulding forming a high pedestal cap motif,

a cast iron Composite-type capital made up from four sections, and a Tuscan-type capital at the plain entablature. Cast HABS iron filigree corner brackets extend from the top of the FLA Composite-type capitals to the bottom of a "frieze," of a 17-PENSA lozenge pattern with rosettes at each "X" crossing, the 15 - height of the Tuscan-type capitals. The wood joists of the roof structure, $2\frac{1}{2}$ " x 4" and 1'-4" on center, are carried on the hangers of a $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 4" cast iron beam. At the canopy roof there are round, ball finialed, cast iron newels which receive the wood and cast iron railings of the cast iron balustrade. The balustrade has alternating filigree sections and balusters.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: There are nine semicircular arched doorways at the front, west facade. Each opening had nine-light glazed fanlights which have been painted over and covered with opaque panels at the exterior. Marble and iron thresholds remain in all the openings which, except for the central opening, have either been closed or converted to display windows. Of the four doorways of the south elevation, two still provide access to the building. The sliding doors, within the four openings with their sheet metal hoods, at the north elevation are permanently closed.
- b. Windows and shutters: The north and south elevations have one-over-one light sash which is of mortise and tenon construction with wooden pin fasteners and is singly hung within wood frames having cast iron sills. Typically the windows have cast iron lintel cornices with raked blocking ornament. Louvered wood blinds, bolted to the wall at the south second floor openings, close several of the first floor openings. The windows of the north elevation have car siding and sheet metal shutters hung on cast iron pintles.

At the west elevation, the fenestration of the second floor level is characterized by the alternating pattern of single and paired engaged columns of a Composite order set on pedestals which have rosette panels in each dado. The paired window openings, the height of the capitals, are hung with one-over-one sash and have a recessed panel above them, but is below the cornice entablature.

Four window openings are closed in the common wall between the east and west sections of the structure. There are foundation vents with cast iron grill infills at the north and south elevations.

7. Chimneys: Four stuccoed brick chimneys with simple corbelled caps extend above the cornice of the south wall.
8. Roof:
- a. Shape and covering: The west section of the building has a modified saw-toothed roof structure which is perpendicular to Palafox Street, while the east section has a gable roof which is parallel to Palafox Street. The roof is covered with a built-up roofing system.
 - b. Cornice and eaves: The building has a bracketed sheet metal cornice which extends around the west and south elevations. The brackets extend over the architrave, through the frieze space and support the modillioned soffit of the cavetto crown moulding. At the west facade large terminal brackets are set at the corners and, like the doubled brackets of the facade, have a palmette relief cap block the height of the crown moulding. The facade is further characterized by a paneled parapet with three higher sections of which the center one has in relief, "1892."
 - c. Roof structures: A sheet metal water tank built for a sprinkler system, presently unused, is located on the roof along with elevator machinery, and sheet metal roof ventilators.

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C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:
- a. First floor: The main entrance from Palafox Street provides access to large sales spaces with adjoining offices and storage-mechanical equipment areas. There is a toilet room under the stair landing.
 - b. Second floor: The second floor is divided into storage spaces with additional storage areas formed by a small mezzanine at the stair landing level and in the store room areas.
2. Stairway: A "T" shaped stairway, located at the center of the plan, has turned newels and balusters which receive a heavy moulded handrail. The landing newels have bosses. Car siding sheaths the stair soffit.
3. Flooring: There is wood flooring in the storage areas and at the second floor. Scored concrete is at much of the first floor which is covered with miscellaneous modern flooring.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: There are various applications of plaster, car siding with beaded edges and reeded patterns, 4" boarding and modern 4' x 8' wall board.
5. Decorative features: There are miscellaneous boxed beams and columns and cornices in first and second floor rooms.
6. Doorways and doors: Four and six panel doors are used typically throughout the structure. At the common wall between the east and west sections of the building, there is a semicircular arched opening with a wood panel in the transom and a pair of two paneled doors, the upper panels in each leaf being glazed.
7. Notable hardware: In addition to the sliding door hardware, the early sprinkler system, which was originally fed from the tank on the roof, also survives.
8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Lighting: The interior has modern electric lighting, though fragments of gas light lines remain.
 - b. Heating: The building has modern gas-fired central heating and cooling equipment, though thimbles at the chimneys indicate that there were originally stoves.
- D. Site and Surroundings: This building faces west on South Palafox Street on the northeast corner of East Main Street, in a commercial area on the fringe of the warehouse-shipping district near the waterfront of Pensacola. Buildings of similar purpose, scale and construction establish the neighborhood character. There is an alley to the north and the old city jail is adjacent to the east.

Prepared by F. Blair Reeves, AIA
HABS--Pensacola
July 19, 1968

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project, sponsored by the Pensacola Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission, now known as the Historic Pensacola Preservation Board of Trustees, in cooperation with the Historic American Buildings Survey, was recorded during the summer of 1968 in Pensacola under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of HABS; Professor F. Blair Reeves, AIA (University of Florida), Project Supervisor; and Student Assistant Architects John O. Crosby (University of Florida), David L. Van de Ven, Jr. (Texas Technological College), and Edward Bondi, Jr. (University of

Florida). The historical information was prepared by Professor Samuel Proctor (University of Florida), by Assistant Historian Linda V. Ellsworth (Historic Pensacola Preservation Board), and by Rodd L. Wheaton (Architect, HABS) who edited all the data in 1972.

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